

ICCRS Colloquium on Baptism in the Spirit: Rome, March 2011

Introduction to the Draft Document: Part I

Baptism in the Spirit (BHS) is the second theme to be addressed by the ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, following the earlier document *Guidelines on Prayer for Healing*. Like the first, this is a pastoral document, primarily written as a pastoral aid for leaders in the Renewal. It is not primarily a theological document, but it needs to have a sound theological basis understandable to pastoral leaders. It therefore contains a section with theological reflection (Part III). The methodology followed is similar to that in the first document, moving from a description of the contemporary reality being addressed through biblical, patristic and theological reflections to a closing pastoral commentary and guidelines.

Methodology and Aims of the Document

In my presentation I will describe what Dr Mary Healy and I have tried to do in preparing this draft.

1. We have tried to keep the focus on BHS and not to allow the contents to become a general statement on all dimensions of CCR. However, because BHS is the foundational reality that gives CR its distinctive character, it has been felt necessary in Part I to treat for example the relationship between BHS and the charisms, while trying to avoid a schematic treatment of the charisms.
2. In the descriptions of BHS and its fruits, we seek to do justice to its scope which is as wide as the life of the Church, so that the later reflections consider all dimensions of this reality. By doing this, we seek to avoid all tendencies to reduce the Renewal to being primarily a movement of prayer and worship, or primarily a movement for evangelization, or primarily focused on healing and deliverance, or primarily a mobilization of the laity (see III.2). It is all these things and more.
3. Following point 2, we have sought to do justice to the newness and distinctive character of BHS which grounds the newness and distinctive character of the Renewal, while avoiding all dangers of exclusivism or elitism. Here we seek to do this descriptively in Part I and more analytically in Part II. This reflection notes the major difference between CCR and the other New Ecclesial Movements (NEMs) in the manner of their origins, which helps to explain both the special character of CCR and some weaknesses of CCR from which the NEMs arising from the call and charism of a human founder are better protected. We end Part III (III, 5) by addressing the question “Is BHS for every Christian?” by answering both Yes and No: yes, in terms of the full flowering of our relationships to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the element of “immediacy” to the triune God and the availability of charisms; no, in terms of needing to belong to the particular movement known as CCR, or of having a particular pattern of experience and no to needing to adopt a particular spirituality or specifically charismatic styles of prayer and ministry.
4. In writing this document, we have been aware that different terminologies have been used in different language-blocs and cultures, particularly that of effusion or equivalent in the Latin-based languages. We have used that of Baptism in the Spirit, not only because we are English-speakers but also because this was the original usage in the beginnings of the Renewal. This usage was a consequence of a coming together of Catholic and Protestant elements in the origins, which at the same time affirms a fundamental commonality but also raises theological challenges. Our sense is that it would be awkward to keep using a hybrid like “Baptism/Effusion” throughout the document. But we

recognize that there may be other ways of handling this difference, which may be one of the tasks of this Consultation. We see clearly that any attempt to impose one terminology would pose major pastoral problems after many years of unquestioned use. We believe that one significant element in the choice of the term BHS was an intrinsic link between this grace of the Spirit and the event of Pentecost, a point frequently made by Fr Raniero Cantalamessa. (p. 43).

5. We consider that the way the Renewal came into being tells us something about God's purposes and that we cannot therefore dismiss the Pentecostal and Protestant influences as unfortunate. However from the start the Catholic theologians involved recognized the need for a distinctively Catholic theology of this grace. As the document is a pastoral document on BHS for Catholic leaders, we have noted but not developed the ecumenical dimension.

6. We have tried to avoid taking sides in the theological debates about the relationship of BHS to received Catholic understandings of the reception and the work of the Holy Spirit, in particular its relationship to the sacraments of initiation. Rather we have sought to integrate the truth that is to be found in each position.

A Few Key Theological Issues

Here I am expressing my own observations at their present stage of development.

1. *New Testament usage.* In the New Testament we find only the verbal form "baptize in Spirit" but never the substantive form "baptism in Spirit". Moreover we never find descriptive accounts of people being baptized in Spirit as a regular occurrence in the way that we find used of sacramental baptism (see Acts 2: 41; 8: 12, 38; 9: 18; 10: 47 - 48; 16: 15, 33; 18: 8; 19: 5; 1 Cor. 1: 16). [and that goes with use of the substantive form]. The only occasions where the biblical text indicates that the prophetic word concerning Jesus baptizing with Spirit was fulfilled are two group occasions with a clear ecclesial significance: the day of Pentecost for Jewish believers from many nations gathered in Jerusalem and the "Gentile Pentecost" at Caesarea for Cornelius and his household (Acts 1: 5; 11: 16). Although I have been one of the major contributors to this draft, as I look at it now I think we have not paid enough attention to the significance of the biblical data I have just outlined.
2. One of the challenges we have faced as Catholics evaluating a terminology which came from the Pentecostal movement is to overcome the individualistic presuppositions of that framework and to receive and live this reality in a Catholic ecclesial context. I ask whether or not it is significant that the two instances in the Acts of the Apostles that speak of the promise of being "baptized in Spirit" received a fulfilment were both profoundly ecclesial and profoundly personal. It is, I believe, significant that the origins of CCR are traced back to a group-event in a retreat house near Pittsburgh, USA in February, 1967.¹ I think the verbal form point also comes in here. The verbal form points to the agent, the one who baptizes in Spirit: in the New Testament this is clearly Jesus. This is one point on which the Pentecostals generally got it right: Jesus as the Baptizer in Holy Spirit was a constant theme of the great Pentecostal ecumenist, David du Plessis. The noun (substantive) form can be in danger of this work of the Spirit being treated as an

¹ In this respect, the origins in the Catholic Church were clearly different from those in the Protestant denominations.

object that can be defined and measured. The noun form lends itself much more easily than the substantive to an individualistic understanding.

3. So am I saying that this document and the Renewal as a whole has been wrong to use the form “Baptism” of a particular grace available to individual Christians today? No, I do not think so. But I would like to see it made clearer that the grace for us personally needs to be understood and lived in the context of something Jesus is pouring out on the Church. We who are personally experiencing a baptizing (immersion) in Spirit are entering into a divine reality being poured out upon the Church. I think such an understanding is more in line with the important words of Pope Benedict cited in the Introduction (p. 3). The Holy Father sees the image of Jesus baptizing in Spirit as a description of the entire mission and ministry of the Lord. It is clearly a wider usage than that normal in CCR, but it could point to a distinctive witness of the Renewal being to help the whole Church realize and live this global mission of Jesus to baptize in Spirit. The often overwhelming impact of this grace in a person’s life easily leads to a major focus on the personal. It is also true that the call to leadership involves a focus on the personal, as leaders face the demands and needs of the people they lead.
4. As we know, there has been under Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI a deepening in the Church’s understanding of the necessary relationship between the institutional and the charismatic. These cannot be totally separated but neither can they be reduced the one to the other. The sacrament of baptism belongs to the institutional that is moved by the Holy Spirit. Jesus baptizing in Spirit in the way we are speaking in the Renewal belongs to the charismatic that needs the institutional for its proper expression and fruit. These thoughts should make us more aware of the danger of turning BHS into a kind of quasi-sacrament and of making all preparations quasi-liturgical.
8. Looking back over the 44 years of CCR, we can thank the Lord for the deepening understanding of this work of the Holy Spirit. It is my personal conviction that we are dealing with something big and key in God’s purposes for the Church, and that the earlier Catholic accounts of BHS tried to present a definitive understanding too fast. The fact that we are grappling with the theology of BHS after all this time is right and reflects the fact that profound works of the Lord need constant humble reflection and cannot be fully understood all at once.